

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) on Wednesday voted in favor of legislation to provide health care for more than 11 million children in modest-income families. The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act was approved by a vote of 289-139. Similar legislation has vetoed twice by President Bush, but President-elect Obama is expected to sign the bill soon after taking office.

"No child in Monterey, San Benito or Santa Cruz should be without access to health care," said Rep. Farr. "It's absolutely unacceptable that millions of children don't have access to simple medical services. This legislation will correct a glaring oversight of the Bush administration."

The bill reauthorizes the SCHIP program through 2013, expanding health care coverage to 11.2 million children. More than 1.5 million children in California already receive health coverage through the program.

"This bill is even more important now as more Americans are losing their jobs," Rep. Farr said. "More and more families are losing their employer-sponsored health care, which means more children suffer needlessly. I'm proud that this is one of the first bills passed by the House, and hope it will be one of the first signed by President Obama."

SCHIP was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children in families earning too little to afford health insurance for their children but too much to qualify for Medicaid. This legislation, H.R. 2, gives states the resources they need to cover millions of uninsured children.

Funds will be generated by raising the tobacco tax by 61 cents. Raising the tobacco tax has the added benefit of promoting children's health by discouraging them from smoking. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a 61-cent increase in the tobacco tax means that 1,873,000 fewer children will take up smoking.

"If I had to name one bill that I would call a no-brainer, this is it," Rep. Farr said. "Our society is defined by how we treat the weakest among us. If we can't ensure that our

children have access to basic health care, I don't know what that says about our values and priorities."

The Senate must vote on the bill before it will be sent to the president for his signature.

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